

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, February 15, 2000

The House met at 9:30 a.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for people who care about livable communities, the D.C. metropolitan area is either a test case or a basket case; sometimes it is both.

In terms of quality of life for the commuter, the experience in recent decades commands a horrid fascination. Between 1982 and 1994, there was a 69 percent increase in the time D.C. area commuters spent stuck in traffic. The average speed on the Beltway has decreased from 47 miles an hour to 23 miles per hour.

In D.C., we are told that the average commuter spends 76 hours a year stuck in traffic; that is almost 10 working days sitting in the car absolutely immobile. In Northern Virginia this summer, nearly 1 out of every 3 days was in violation of ozone clean air standards.

Mr. Speaker, of course, it is no secret that in this metropolitan area we are sprawling far more rapidly than we increase in population. From 1970 to 1990, Metropolitan Washington population grew 25 percent, yet the area that we consume increased over 60 percent.

The suburbs here grew by a population of 18.3 percent while the District itself lost 17 percent of its residents. In the first 7 years of the 1990s, the District was hemorrhaging one person every hour.

There are solutions which we know will not work; one is trying to simply pave our way out of congestion. The congestion in the United States will triple over the next 15 years, even if we increase capacity 20 percent.

The same people who tell us that we have the second worst congestion in the country found that, despite roughly \$30.8 billion spent by urban areas to

add more vehicle lanes, congestion levels remained almost identical to urban areas that did not.

Mr. Speaker, of course, here we do not have any thoughtful regional land use. But at an era of smart growth, we seem to be continuing to engage in dumb growth, like putting a massive stadium with huge public subsidy out in the middle of nowhere where it is virtually inaccessible any way other than by car and then being surprised when on opening day it is jammed and some people actually are abandoning their cars to get to the game.

We continue to scatter development throughout the region away from Metro stations and designated growth sites. There are things that can, in fact, work and make a difference.

Last week in Atlanta, Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater launched the Commuter Choice Initiative, a program that was created in TEA-21 to provide \$65 a month in tax-free transit or vanpool benefits for employees in both the private and the public sector.

While this effort is a step in the right direction, we in Congress need to make sure that the Federal Government leads by example. Unfortunately, here in our congested metropolitan area, there is no uniform program or policy for our Federal employees, yet 350,000 Federal employees make up the majority of people who work here in and near transit.

There is no uniform parking or commuter policy across the Federal Government. The costs and subsidy for parking varies, different levels of transit subsidy.

Mr. Speaker, the administration is looking at an Executive order for Federal transportation in the National Capital region. This Executive order that they are looking at would require each Federal agency in the region to support transit and commercial vanpool benefits, to increase carpool and vanpool benefits, encourage bicycle and walking and provide shuttle service between transit points and agency workplaces where appropriate.

Last week, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) introduced legislation that would make this happen much faster via the legislative route. His bill would expand Federal employee commuter options and accept the Federal Government's responsibility as the single largest employer in the Capital region to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited about the gentleman from Virginia's leadership

and the way that the administration is moving. I hope, however it is done, that we do not let an extra minute go by. People who are caught in traffic as we speak this moment deserve the best from the Federal Government to make our communities more livable, to make our families safe, healthy, and economically secure.

Having a uniform comprehensive approach to the Federal Government's transportation issues in the metropolitan region is an important step in that direction.

THE CBO REPORTS ON MEDICARE HMOs

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. GANSKE. Mr. Speaker, remember when we debated the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Reform Act here on the floor about 3 months ago, and the HMO industry said the sky will fall, the sky will fall; premiums will go out of site.

We get the accurate answer, the accurate answer from the Congressional Budget Office, which has analyzed the bill which passed this floor by a vote of 275 to 151.

What did the CBO say would be the cost? The CBO said that over 5 years, the cost of premiums would go up 4.1 percent total. Now, this is important to understand.

All my colleagues should listen. The HMO industry will say 4.1 percent each year. Wrong. That is not what the CBO report says. In fact, I talked to a CBO staffer, Tom Bradley, last night and he said that in the first year there would be almost no effect. In the second, third, fourth and fifth years, premiums would go up about 1 percent over what they normally would be because of this legislation.

To my friends who debated this liability issue so vigorously, who said liability will cost so much, well look at what the CBO said. The CBO said when it looked at the bipartisan consensus bill that the largest single coster was not liability. The largest single coster in our bill is the internal and external appeals process, at 1.3 percent. Why is that? Well, because they recognize that HMOs are inappropriately denying care and that if a patient has an opportunity to take that denial of care to an independent peer panel, that about 50

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.